

Course Name: The Novel and Change

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Week – 01

Lecture 5

Hello and welcome to this NPTEL course titled The Novel in Change where we will continue with the text Robinson Crusoe. So, we will skip the novel a little bit and we move on to a section where he talks about savages and this should be on your screen, fear of savages. So, we saw, we stopped last time where Crusoe was doing essentially a bookkeeping of the good and bad things happening to him and how the very Christian vocabulary, the very religious rhetoric is essentially shaping his bookkeeping discourse, is essentially shaping his very capitalist discourse of the useful and non-useful, the good and the bad etc. Now we had also seen how the entire definition of the savage, the definition of the beast is interchangeable with anyone who is not a white man. And now in this particular section we look at the politics of constructing the savage, constructing the other. Because we had already seen in the last class, in the last session how Crusoe maintains a very dualistic view of the world, a very binaristic view of the world.

There is good, there is evil, there is white and non-white, there is human and non-human, there is civilized and non-civilized. So, and this binary is projected throughout the novel and this binary, this dualism is essentially a construct of the times and we will look at the times more closely in the subsequent sessions. But for the purpose of studying this particular text we look at how the fear of savages or what we can call xenophobia and essentially what becomes xenophobia and obviously we can look at more contemporary examples of xenophobia where someone who doesn't look like you, someone who doesn't look like or doesn't feel or doesn't appear who you are, close to who you are can essentially be called a savage, can essentially be called someone who is an outsider. So, we can connect this to many contemporary geopolitical conditions and this is exactly what xenophobia is, fear of the other, xenophobia, the other, phobia being fear.

So, this should be on your screen, page 139 in this version that we are using. With my boat I carried away everything that I had left there belonging to her, though not necessary for the bear going there thither, with a mast and sail which I had made for her, and a thing like an anchor, but indeed which could not be called either anchor or grappling, however it was the best I could make of its kind. All these are removed, and there might not be the least shadow of any discovery or any appearance of any boat or any human habitation upon the island. So, he's essentially figured out that he's seen some footprints before that and he's obviously scared and he feels threatened and vulnerable and precarious and again we talked about how even way back when he was bringing the basic amenities from the ship the moment he acquired and gathered the commodities and objects and amenities his next sentiment was how to protect it against a possible attack. So you know the whole idea of Compiling the commodity, creating the commodity and gathering it is just, you know, the next step, the next subsequent, the next logical step, sentimental step is the fear of how to protect this against any imminent attack, any imminent threat.

Besides this, I kept myself, as I said, more retired than ever, and seldom went out from my cell, other than upon my constant employment ways to milk my she-goats and manage my little flock in the wood, which, as it was quite on the other part of the island, was quite out of danger. For certain it is that these savage people, who sometimes haunted this island, never came with any thoughts of finding anything here, and consequently never wandered off from the coast." So, the savages are haunting the island but Crusoe is owning the island which is pretty much Crusoe's island now as the narrative also tells us. And we can see how the binary here is operative. The white man owns it, the non-white man haunts it and that tells you something, doesn't it? But I doubt not, but they might have been several times, I'm sure, after my apprehensions of them had made me cautious as well as before. And indeed, I looked back with some horror upon the thoughts of what my condition would have been if I had chopped upon them and been discovered before that, when, naked and unarmed, except with one gun, and that loaded often with one small shot, I walked everywhere, peeping and peeping about the island, to see what I could get. What a surprise should I have been in, if when I discovered the print of a man's foot, I had instead of that

seen fifteen or twenty savages, and found them pursuing me, and by the swiftness of their running, no possibility of my escaping them. So the reason why I'm reading this out a little bit is also to underline how the humans who are called quote unquote savages are also described through excess.

So, they can outrun the white man. They are essentially beasts. They are obviously cannibals. They can eat the human beings. And, you know, they seem to be excessive in every which way. And there's a classic case of othering. For those of you who read Edward Said's *Orientalism*, for example, would know that entire rhetoric which is spoken and designed from a very Eurocentric position and this is a classic Eurocentric position, it relies on creating the other through excesses you know whether it is excesses of vilification, excesses of monstrosity, excesses of reification you know whatever the design may be but it is obviously almost always through an excess right. Excess of savagery, the whole idea of the savage for example, if someone is outside, he civilized space. And we talked about how territory is political in *Robinson Crusoe*, how whatever is outside Crusoe's territory is by default savage. I mean, this is a classic case in point. So, his part of the island is civilized, whereas the part of the island which is outside of his skin, outside of his perimeter, is by default the savage bit of the island, inhabited by, you know, haunted by the savages who can outrun him and who can capture him and who can presumably eat him up, right? Classic monsters. I believe the reader of this will not think it strange if I confess that these anxieties and these constant dangers I lived in and a concern that was upon me put an end to all invention and all the contrivances that I had laid for my future accommodations and conveniences. I had the care of my safety more now upon my hands than that of my food. So, my physical well-being, my physical safety is now more important than food. I cared not to drive a nail. or chop a stick of wood now, for fear the noise I should make should be heard, much less would I fire a gun, for the same reason, and above all, I was intolerably uneasy at making any fire, lest a smoke, which is visible at a great distance in the day, should betray me, and for this reason I removed that part of my business which required fire, such as burning of pots and pipes, etc., into my new apartment in the woods, where after I had been for some time, I found to my unspeakable consolation, a mere natural cave in the earth, which went in a vast way.

And where, I dare say, no savage, had he been at the mouth of it, would be so haughty as to venture in, nor indeed would any man else, but one who, like me, wanted nothing so much as a safe retreat. Right, now he's giving us, you know, a very detailed description of the rock and the cave in which he's sheltering himself and again the vocabulary becomes very Christian, very biblical occasionally and how the biblical vocabulary is obviously instrumentalized to talk about the survival of the white man essentially, right. So, and this is where you know the whole idea of cooking differently, living differently comes into the forefront and this should be on the screen. I was afraid of making a smoke about my habitation. As I said you know the visibility of the smoke might give him away, might give away his location. as I said before, and yet I could not live there without baking my bread, cooking my meat, etc. So, I contrived to burn some wood here, as I had seen done in England on the turf, until it became dark, or chalk, or dry coal, and then putting the fire out. I preserved the coal to carry home, and performed the other services which fire was wanting for at home, without danger of smoke. He is now creating different kind of culinary practices you know barbecuing essentially and other kind of things in order to protect himself and you know the fear of the other is constantly haunting his mind and he is recalibrating essentially his survival strategies, his cooking strategies in order to protect himself from the savages. Of course, we look at how the whole idea of savage becomes problematic because it is a classic case of othering, classic case of reification, right.

And the xenophobia in Robinson Crusoe is also connected to the protection of the capital, the protection of the commodity because he has a lot of commodity, you know, that he can protect, he needs to protect. So, acquiring of commodity and the protection of commodity, you know, go hand in hand, right. So, we will move on now to Chapter 13, which is called The Wreck. And the reason why we are reading it, because it gives us a timeline in a certain sense of how many years he has been on the island and, you know, his different engagements with nature, different engagements with his pets, there is a parrot that he has called Paul, essentially that is his only interlocutor and so on and so forth. this particular chapter does is how the whole exotic quality of the island has been normalized, has been naturalized by Robinson Crusoe and you know essentially making this into his island and

then it is also giving us a time frame and the temporality in his mind is also connected to the mappability of the island. So, space and time are always connected in Robinson Crusoe and one of the theoretical frameworks one can look at while looking at what we read in his novel is Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope space and time. So, the island becomes essentially a chronotope for Robinson Crusoe. So, it is mappable in terms of spatial layout, but also the temporality of the island in terms of how it is playing out you know in terms of time also gives it a recognizable quality, a naturalized quality. So, the wreck in chapter 13, which should be on your screen. I was now in my 23rd year of residence in this island and was so naturalized to the place and to the manner of living that could I have but enjoyed the certainty that no savages would come to the place to disturb me, I could have been content to have capitulated for spending the rest of my time here, there, even to the last moment, till I had laid me down and died like the old goat in the cave. I had also arrived to some little diversions and amusements which made the time pass more pleasantly with me a great deal than it did before. So, amusement over here is the ludic content, ludic component of the island in terms of how he is creating play, creating games around him, not just sustaining himself but also going beyond utility, going beyond what is useful to create some kind of a ludic component which is also keeping him in good stead. So, at first, as first I had taught my Paul, as I noted before, to speak, and I did it so familiarly, and talked so articulately and plain, that it was very pleasant to me, Paul being the parrot. And he lived with me no less than six and twenty years. How long he might live, afterwards I know not, though I know they have a notion in the Brazils that they live a hundred years. Perhaps poor Paul may be alive there still, calling after poor Robin Crusoe to this day. I wish no Englishman the ill luck to come there and hear him. But if he did, he would certainly believe that it was the devil. My dog was a very pleasant and loving companion to me for no less than sixteen years of my time, and then died of mere old age.

As for my cats, they multiplied, and I have observed to that degree that I was obliged to shoot several of them at first to keep them from devouring me and all I had. But at length, when the two old ones they brought with me were gone, and after some time continually driving them from me and letting them have no provision with me, they all ran wild into the woods, except two or three favourites, which I kept tame, and those young, when they

had any, I always drowned, and those were part of my family. Now, Why am I reading this in some detail? It is also because, this is interesting because we can see how the cyclicity of sustenance and violence operates seamlessly in Robinson Crusoe because there are instances where he is affectionately describing his creatures, you know, his dog and his parrot and his cat, but at the same time, this constant note of violence, a ring of violence, the cats wanted to devour him and his food supplies. So, he shot the cats, he drowned the newborn cats, et cetera. So, it is a very, very grotesque violence, which is almost seamlessly smuggled inside. the sustenance story, the survival story that Crusoe was delivering over here and which tells us something very interesting, how the entire human subjectivity which is preserved and protected and you know and perpetrated through Robinson Crusoe's survival is never really removed so to speak from this constant tone of violence, this constant ring of violence, right of course the parrot here becomes quite symbolic because the parrot only knows how to say his name and parrot only tells him what he wants to hear. So you know in a certain sense mimicking the white man, mimicking Robinson Crusoe becomes important over here because mimicry becomes and this is something which we will see later and we will read this bit in a bit now but mimicry becomes an important part of the colonial enterprise because you know the white subject goes to the island and teaches his language to non-humans over here the parrot which begins to tell him what he wants to hear which begins to tell him his name you know essentially and that's the only thing that the parrot can say along with certain other words which are taught to him and that linguistic familiarity which is artificially created by the white man creates some kind of a ludic landscape, playful landscape around him which contributes to his survival. Now we look at this bit in the story which is a very important bit where Crusoe essentially rescues one non-white subject from other non-white subjects and we look at how deeply problematic this particular passage is. So, I request you to pay some attention and this should be on your screen. So, this is a bit where he is obviously exercising his God gaze, looking at what is happening and wanting to, you know, intervene and then ends up intervening. And this should be on your screen. After sitting a while longer and musing what I should do in this case, I was not able to bear sitting in ignorance any longer. So, setting up my ladder to the side of my hill, where there was a flat place, as you observed before, and then pulling the ladder up after me, I set it up again and mounted to the top of the hill.

This is the top of the hill where you can have this God gaze, project the God gaze, because he knows the coordinates so well. The entire island is now a cartographic construct to Robinson Crusoe. And pulling out my perspective glass, which is again very symbolic because it gives them that omniscient perspective, the binoculars essentially, which I had taken on purpose, I laid me down flat on my belly on the ground and began to look for the place. I presently found there was no less than nine naked savages sitting around a small fire they had made, not to warm them, for they had no need for that, the weather being extreme hot, but as I supposed to dress some of their barbarous diet of human flesh which they had brought with them, whether alive or dead, I could not know. The most interesting, the most important word over here is supposed, as I suppose. So, the entire thing is projected from Crusoe's imagination, from Crusoe's subject position where he is saying, well, I am seeing nine naked men and you know creating a fire and they are creating a fire obviously to eat something because it was very hot and there was no need to make a fire to keep them warm. And I suppose, I am guessing, I am speculating and this speculation becomes you know naturalized and normativized very very quickly. Why are they creating the fire? To obviously burn some other human and eat that flesh and that diet is a barbarous diet. I request you to pay some attention to the adjectives over here. Barbarous diet of human flesh. So, these are cannibals. Obviously, they are cannibals because they are non-white, you know. And this entire projection of cannibalism, this entire projection of non-civilization, this entire projection of monstrosity is coming from the perspective glass, very symbolically, the perspective glass of the human subject, the white human subject, the white male subject, right. So, the human, non-human binary over here, essentially is a more manicured projection of the white, non-white binary. And very symbolically, this is done through mounting a ladder and looking at it from a perspective glass. So, a ladder and a perspective glass, the two objects over here, they become quite symbolic in terms of acquiring the currency of the God-gaze, acquiring the omnipotent, omnipresent currency of the God-gaze, which Crusoe is exercising over here.

They had two canals with them, which they had holed up upon the shore. Now, what I would also highlight over here, so these are men who know how to make a fire, who know

how to build a canal, who know how to row a canal, but obviously these things are sidelined very quickly, and what is foregrounded is a savagery. What is foregrounded is the fact that they're about to kill someone and burn the person and obviously eat the person alive, which is how barbaric they are, right? What are the other... other skillful things that the homo faber bit the fact that they are also craftsmen of some kind they built a fire they built a canal they are homo fabers they build things also that bit is uh concealed that bit is uh you know put in the background what is sort of foregrounded essentially is a supposed savagery from the perspective glass of the white male subject So there are two canals with them which they had hauled up upon the shore. And as it was then tide of ebb, there seemed to me to wait for the return of the flood to go away again. It was not easy to imagine what confusion this sight put me into, especially seeing them come on my side of the island, my side of the island. Look at the territoriality of the language over here. So, they have come to my side of the island. So, they are trespassers essentially. And you can see how this entire xenophobic rhetoric can be mapped into some very contemporary geopolitical narratives on how outsiders are coming and taking over our island, outsiders are coming and taking over our culture, posing a threat to our culture, making us vulnerable etc. etc. Now all these narratives, the way they are spun essentially also rely on oblivion of all kinds, how certain things are very conveniently forgotten, how the people who are now supposedly the insiders but also outsiders once upon a time. They came and territorialized the place and took it over, made it their home, made it their culture, made it their plantation.

Very similar to how Robinson Crusoe operates over here. And once you build a plantation, once you project the plantation, once you erect the plantation, then obviously you create a sense of insider and outsider, right? We're also very conveniently erasing away, forgetting away things which happened earlier. So my side of the island becomes a very symbolic way to describe it. so near me too, but when I observed their coming, must be always with the current of the air, I began afterwards to be more sedate in my mind, being satisfied that I might go abroad with safety all the time of the tide of flood, if they were not on shore before, and having made this observation, I went abroad about my harvest work, with the more composure. So, he has figured out the time of arrival and departure.

So, it comes to the ebb and the flow. So, they come during a certain time of the ebb and go back certain time of the flow. So, he will calibrate his movement accordingly so as to avoid any interaction or any engagement or any encounter with these supposed savages. as expected, so it proved. Now, also notice how he is mapping the behaviour and anticipating the behaviour and this anticipatory knowledge is very, very important, right, in terms of how the white male subject is using his cognitive lenses, you know, very symbolic with the binocular, his cognitive vision, very symbolic with the mounted ladder, in order to have an anticipatory knowledge of the non-white subject's behaviour, just so he can calibrate his behaviour and recalibrate his behaviour accordingly.

As expected, so it proved. Obviously, the white man is right. For as soon as the tide made to that westward, I saw them all take boat and row, or paddle, as we call it, all away. I should have observed that for an hour and more before they went off, they went to dancing, and I could easily discern their postures and gestures by my glasses. So again, this is a classic case of also objectifying the other. So, through his glasses, very symbolically, through his binoculars, he is magnifying them, right, he is amplifying them and his amplification and magnification are also connected to the exaggeration, the excesses through which they are described. So, the linguistic vocabulary, the linguistic register over here is one of excess and exaggeration and the visual vocabulary is one of amplification and magnification and the two vocabularies are connected to each other. obviously not an accident, obviously not something innocent, these are very connected you know organically and discursively, right. So, we can see the postures and gestures by my glasses and magnifying and amplifying and you know obviously exaggerating and excessively describing it. As soon as I saw them shipped and gone, I took two guns upon shoulders, and two pistols at my girdle, and my great sword by my side, so he is covering himself with ammunition of all kinds, without a scabbard, and all with the speed I was able to make a vent away to the hill, where I had discovered the first appearance of all. And as soon as I got thither, which is not less than two hours, for I got, I could not go apace, being so laden with arms as I was, I perceived, there have been three canoes more of savages on that place and looking out further I saw they are all at sea together making over for the main. So, in other words this is the Robinson Crusoe version of the immigrants are coming. right, the

Robinson Crusoe version of the dreadful immigrants, the dreadful outsiders are coming. So, you must all gun up, you must all ammunition up, you must all you know cover yourself with ammunition, close the borders, close the, take the control of the borders and make sure no outsiders come in. So this is classic case of how the entire xenophobia about immigrants, unlawful immigrants are taking place in this island. Well, it's a different story how if one contests Crusoe's legality of occupation in the first place. This was a dreadful sight to me, especially when, going down to the shore, I could see the marks of horror which the dismal work they had been about they left behind it, with the blood, the bones and part of the flesh of the human bodies, eaten and devoured by those wretches with merriment and sport. We just saw a little while earlier how Crusoe has absolutely no qualms about drowning newborn cats. He has got absolutely no qualms about killing off newborn animals because they are a threat to his food and supplies.

But at the same time, he is so shocked and shuddered looking at the blood and bones of other people's diets. so filled with indignation at the sight that I began now to premeditate the destruction of the next that I saw there. Let them be who or how many soever." Now, we will stop at this point, but this indignation, this shudder, this horror of Crusoe is a classic case of how the subject is creating the abject. It is not just the object, but the abject. The abject is something which is causing shudder and revulsion and disgust. So, the subject-abject binary is important over here. So, not just, I mean, there is subject and object and object can be commodified, object can be recovered and made into a commodity, but what we see over here is outside the object, you know, it is just the pure thing of horror, the pure thing of disgust and revulsion, which is the domain of the object. Now, the subject-object binary is important over here and this consolidates. The entire, the constructed quality of civilization, the constructed quality of culture that Crusoe is epitomizing and embodying over here as a white male with gun and enormous supplies of ammunition. So, we'll stop at this point today and we'll continue with this politics of classification and wind up the story in a subsequent class. Thank you for your attention.